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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE
AGRICULTURAL ESTIMATES DIVISION

Report on Meeting of Panel of Consultants
January 16-17, 1956

Panel members in attendance were L. L. Boger, W. T. Federer, E. O. Heady, and G. M. Kuznets. Raymond Bowman, Chief, and Raymond Nassimbene of the Office of Statistical Standards in the Budget Bureau; Omer Herrmann, Deputy Administrator for Marketing Research and Statistics, and Earl Houseman, Chief Statistical Officer in AMS; and Jack Fleisher and Norman Strand of the Statistical Laboratories at North Carolina State College and Iowa State College also attended the sessions. The group met with representatives of the Division to discuss plans for future activities under the program.

The Panel concurs in plans presented by the Division for research activities during the coming year. But, the Panel feels that more emphasis needs to be given to integrating the results of research into the regular operations of the Division. The Panel gains the impression that too little thought has been given to setting up a specific program for that purpose. The original objective of orderly progressive expansion of the research program from year to year, with a transition to operational status taking place as rapidly as the research results warrant, should be given a high priority within the Agricultural Marketing Service. The Panel feels that the Agricultural Marketing Service is proceeding too slowly in providing for transition from the research phase to an operating phase. Furthermore, the Panel is of the opinion that additions to the Division's operating program that occur from time to time, as a result of needs expressed by the public, should be set up with more regard for the overall objective of improving the quality of the methodology employed throughout the Division as a whole. Actually an expanded research program should anticipate many of these needs and start the necessary research to develop methodology before public needs are expressed in the form of appropriations directed to specific jobs. The following specific recommendations are made:

1. In the Panel's view the most urgent problem facing the Division is the translation of research results into an operational program. Securing facilities for setting up an operational program should be given top priority. The Panel recommends that much higher priority be given to converting research projects underway into an operating program in the Southern States and in other areas than was reflected in proposals made by the Division in its discussion with the Panel.
2. A specific timetable for expansion of the research studies by regions and for transition to operating status should be established. Systematic and continuing effort to secure the required appropriations should be geared to the schedule of step by step transition to an operating program projected by the timetable.
3. Provision needs to be made for a discussion with the Panel in the immediate future on subject matter fields that should be covered in the expanded research program and in its transition into an operating program.

4. It is essential that as new operating projects are taken on in the Division, the development of the working procedures for such projects be closely integrated with the research program and rest on a firm basis of research when the need for such research seems to be indicated. This applies to such undertakings as the new Potato Surveys and the work on Horticultural Specialties proposed to be initiated in Fiscal Year 1957, the Quarterly Pig Surveys, which are at present conducted as individual State projects but which are expected to be coordinated to permit the release of a consolidated report, contemplated additions to the present Cold Storage work, and the studies on Corn Quality which have been suggested as a part of the research program in the Corn Belt States during the coming crop year.
5. The Panel strongly recommends that the Division provide more adequate technical review of proposed procedures for new undertakings such as those listed under Item 4 above while they are still in the planning stages, to insure that such procedures are in accord with the long-range program of methodological improvement which is also the objective of the research program itself.
6. The Panel strongly recommends that the Division not undertake new projects or assignments as part of its regular operating activities unless such projects and assignments can be integrated into the overall operations of the Division in a manner consistent with the general objective of improvement of statistical methodology within the Division.
7. As new projects are undertaken, or as new operational problems arise in any phase of the Division's overall operations, some preliminary research may be needed before satisfactory working procedures can be recommended. Such research should be a required preliminary to the foundation of plans for the new undertaking.
8. The Panel concurs with the views of the Division that the problem of reconciling objective yield indications with Census information and data reported by farmers, as exemplified by experience with corn yield data, needs further attention. Because any changes in published levels of yield concern the Census Bureau as well as the Department of Agriculture, the Panel recommends that the two agencies arrange for a joint study of the problem. A joint approach is desirable because of the common interest of the two agencies in reported yield data and to avoid the publication of conflicting data.
9. In view of proposals that have been advanced for Sample Censuses of Agriculture, the problem of coordinating the development of sample farm surveys in the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Census Bureau is likely to become of primary importance in the near future. The Panel strongly recommends that steps be initiated promptly for a joint consideration of the coordination of these activities in the two agencies.

10. The Panel recommends that cooperative studies at the Statistical Laboratories of Iowa State College and North Carolina State College be directed mainly toward problems associated with objective yield forecasts of crops. For many crops, necessary background information on the relations between measurable plant characteristics and final yields is still deficient. Priority should be given to crops for which the need seems to be particularly acute. Possible crops for consideration seem to be soybeans, tobacco, peanuts, and potatoes. But, objective yield work on additional crops at the College Laboratories should not preclude some studies of these crops on an extensive basis in the areas where the Division research program is conducted. These should be coordinated with the research in the Laboratories.

